

Attachment 2-5



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Organizational Culture: Cultural change work in
progress (2016) pp. 175-182.

would support the self-image of the change manager as an interpreter and educator (Lawrence *et al.* 2006; Palmer *et al.* 2006).

What can be learned? Fifteen lessons for cultural change projects

We will now address some practical implications for organizational cultural change work - and to some extent for change work in general and for management more broadly. Some general suggestions for business performance, as discussed in Chapter 2, may be seen as relevant here. Beer (2000) claims that the following organizational behaviours lead to high performance: *coordination* between functions, businesses and regions, *commitment* to consumer needs, *competence* in the function most critical for success, *communications* that engage people in honest dialogue, and *creativity* in both technical and administrative areas. Heracleous and Langham (1996) suggest four significant issues in successful change management: visible and clear leadership, clear communication, involvement of employees in the planning phase and developing new skills. Beer and Nohria (2000) claim to have cracked the code for successful change by suggesting a combination of E- and O-type changes, i.e. focusing upon both pure economic conditions and organizational capabilities. It is, of course, difficult to object to these quite general prescriptions. Like most efforts to identify key variables, they refer to themes framed in such a way that they are by definition important and seeming to bring about favourable outcomes. They would not stand the 'negativity' test, i.e. it would not make sense to claim the opposite, to argue for unclear communication, disinterest in customer needs and neglect of creativity. And if the unfortunate change people in TC had been better at accomplishing for example coordination, commitment, competence, communication and creativity, recommended by Beer and Nohria (and most others in the advice business), the change project would by definition have been perceived in a more positive way.

In terms of the use of principles for change work, it is common and perhaps too easy to produce suggestions where the positive outcome is already present in the words used to accomplish this (cf. Sandelands and Drazin 1989). The action and the outcome are confused - and the statements become tautological. As seen from Chapter 3, Beer (2000) suggests principles such as mobilizing energy for change, developing a new compelling vision and identifying barriers to implementing the new direction (examples of barriers would be for example 'unclear strategy', 'an ineffective top team', 'poor coordination' and 'inadequate leadership'). Similarly, Kotter (1996) suggests that in order to produce change it is important to establish a sense of urgency, create guiding coalitions, develop and communicate a clear vision and strategy, empower employees, generate and consolidate short-term wins and anchor new approaches in existing culture (counteracting 'no urgency', 'poor guides', 'fuzzy vision and strategy', 'neglect of change progression, potential barriers and existing culture'). Connecting to the OD approaches, Robbins (2003: 566) suggests that the following values should accompany change: 'respect for people', 'trust and support', 'power equalization', 'confrontation' in terms of

openly discussing problems, and 'participation' (issues to be confronted include 'disrespect', 'mistrust and lack of support', 'hierarchical relations', and 'closed and secret change processes'). These suggestions and issues of change may intuitively sound helpful, but do not necessarily say more than do something positive and get rid of the bad stuff. They are not necessarily very helpful in drawing attention to what it is important to focus upon: an interest in strategy, people, power, communication and engagement, which is perhaps not very surprising (after all, what else could one be interested in?).

Having expressed this scepticism, we realize that we may have painted ourselves into a corner. We probably also deserve critique when trying to express a few lessons of relevance for practical work with changes. We try, however, to be a bit more cautious than is common and don't claim to provide a recipe for how to work successfully. As many commentators on change suggest, there are no easy or universally valid truths in the business of organizational change. But we do think that our case - combined with general knowledge about organizational cultures and change projects- indicates the importance of seriously considering the issues below. We divide them into five overall themes: framing context, organizing change work(ers), content, tactics and process.

Framing context

- 1 See organizational transformation as a matter of *self-transformations including everybody, not just those to be 'worked upon' for improvement*. The entire organization is then included in the change process; it is not just a matter of an enlightened elite getting the organization or 'them' to change. People active in changing need to think through their ideas, beliefs and meanings - avoiding assuming that they have got it right and now it is a matter of getting others to transform. This assumption is common in the practitioner-oriented change literature.
- 2 Work with *moderate* (realistic) *aims* and proceed from the experiences of existing culture, realizing that only some progress can be made within the near future. Avoid getting caught in a huge gap between ideals and reality. As seen throughout the book, there is an assumption in much of the practitioner-oriented literature that top and senior managers can direct change. However, the basis of cultural change should be the meanings and orientations of the large group of employees, not the dream worlds of senior managers and consultants with little contact with the meanings and orientations expressed in everyday organizational life.
- 3 There is a need for endurance and *a long-term view*. Culture is a slow-moving phenomenon; persistence in coming back to, varying and pushing for the ideas, meanings and ideals that are advocated is an absolute must. Quick fixes do not work. Of course the more persistent and enduring the approach, the better the aims make sense, given sustained effort. (So points 2 and 3 correspond.)

Organizing change work(ers)

- 4 Cultural change work calls for accepting the need for *integration* of conceptualization and implementation and on-going follow-up work. Change work calls for those involved to consider the whole project- division of labour, commonly advanced in much change literature (Ghoshal and Bartlett 1996; Kotter 1996; Lawrence *et al.* 2006), leads to unanticipated problems.
- 5 It is important not only to manage and clarify the roles and relationships between those engaged in change work but also to address their *identities*. People need to clarify how they view themselves in the specific context of the change programme and make sure that this view is understood by others. Callon and Latour (1981) suggest 'enlisting key actors' by clarifying terms of involvement such as roles and identities of participants. Role expectations need to be aligned with identities and discrepancies clarified.
- 6 Equally important, and related to identity clarification, is the theme of developing and, when called for, revising *the basic image* of the change programme. Is it an eye-opener or a profound transformation effort? Is it manager driven and unitary or is it supposed to include local initiative and variation? Coherence in communication needs to be thought through here and, as far as possible, accomplished. The success of the change work is presumably partly a matter of a number of people having a broadly similar view of what the work is basically about.
- 7 There is a need for a *strong sense of a 'we'* in change work-if those promoting and seen as symbolizing the cultural change are viewed as outsiders or on the periphery of an organization, then the change project's credibility and experienced relevance will be questioned. In particular it is important to avoid a negative symbolism being ascribed to those working with organizational and cultural change.¹ If large groups of employees have low confidence in for example senior executives, HR people or consultants and see these as 'peripheral' or outsiders, at the same time as they are viewed as central in the change work, then this will not be convincing. It may, as in our case, easily be interpreted as another 'HR thing'. An obvious solution would be to ask some typical employees or middle managers to work with the project, together with HR people, consultant and senior managers. This would suggest that the project is of concern also for people belonging to and symbolizing 'us' - the broad, core groups in the firm - and not only people easily viewed as outside the group that most people identify with.

Content

- 8 *Avoid the self-evidently good.* Cultural change work is in vital respects facilitated by a critique of some dominant, existing orientations and the proposal of something controversial. Promoting the self-evidently good- such as quality, customer orientation, growth, respect for people, etc. - easily leads to no effects (yawn). Instead what tends to shake people up a bit and spark

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discussion and questioning has a better chance of leading somewhere (e.g. 'We believe in the well-run-machine bureaucracy'). Once again this relates to the theme of being careful about hyperculture.

- 9 Focus on *meanings*, rather than- or at least more than-values. Many writers on change discuss the importance of having credos and values of organizational change that reach beyond the everyday lives of employees in order to trigger creative tensions and subsequent action on the part of employees (Ghoshal and Bartlett 1996; Kotter 1996; Senge 1996). It is, of course, important to have some idea of the change direction, but we think that a one-sided focus on values easily invokes a preference for ideals rather than what is realized and what people mean - the projection of an ideal world confused with what exists (hyperculture). The meaning and understanding of the basic elements of organizational culture that are targeted for rethinking need to be clarified. Ask questions such as 'What is going on here?' and 'What is wrong with this place?' before seeking ideals. Clarifying problematic assumptions and wishful thinking calls for investigations and self-critique around meanings.

Tactics

- 10 *Combine pushing and dialogue.* In order to create both push and pull, paying close attention to the interplay between central agents - who are highly committed - and others is vital. Selected other groups need to be called upon to contribute, convince, inspire and remind larger groups (and to report back and take seriously the views of these larger groups). These selected others must be mobilized and encouraged to mobilize themselves. But they may need input and some push. Follow-up meetings with a mix of pushing and dialogue are important here. This amounts to something beyond what many authors of organizational change refer to as clear and one-sided communication of visions, strategy or direction of change efforts to core groups (Beer 2000; Kotter 1996). In addition, we address issues of intimate and frequent interaction, in terms of dialogue, sense giving and sense making, reporting, follow-up and feedback, in and between various core groups in order to support encouragement for changes. Reminding and 'nagging' also appear important. The relay race here offers an 'anti-model' or negative example.
- 11 Working with organizational culture calls for skilful work with *emotions and symbolism* - the formulation of messages that appeal not only to reason and intellect but also to emotion and imagination is important. Formulated in negative terms, this means that cultural thinness/symbolic anorexia must be avoided. It also calls for a level of expressiveness and emotionality that is at odds with a bureaucratic style. We are not suggesting that cultural work calls for charismatic performances or singing-and-dancing sessions. But the idea of targeting values goes beyond the instrumental working through of procedures and calls for a higher level of demonstrated enthusiasm to be credible and have a chance of 'sticking'. To just follow the flow contingent upon a bureaucratic cultural mentality does not seem to be effective in this kind of project.

Process

- 12 It is important to take seriously the local sense making that takes place in organizations during change. Cultural change efforts call for *connecting to people's experiences* in a positive sense. This means that one should ground ideas and ideals in the local organizational context and try to avoid the repetition of standard formulas. The temptation to follow the example and style of others and produce hyperculture should be resisted. Expressed differently, it means another trade-off than that which seems to be common between ideas, meanings and values close to experience on the one hand and what sounds good in semi-public statements on the other. (See also point 8 above.)
- 13 *Pay careful attention to process and 'reception'.* Here it is important to draw attention to meaning and sense making from a variety of actors involved in the change efforts. This exploration suggests that how the messages about change are interpreted and made sense of by various groups of employees must be carefully followed and listened to. Learning and adapting are crucial. Revisiting plans, reviewing the process and revising the ideas and roles of those active are important ingredients. Cultural change work can't follow a rationally decided design. This is an area with very strong limits to rationality - close attention to process is called for. For this reason a model strictly dividing up the change work in planning and implementation is problematic.
- 14 *Keep cultural themes on the agenda.* There is a need for on-going work. Avoid 'ticking off culture work- 'now over to something else'. Leadership partly means putting important things on the agenda - and keeping them there (Kotter 1999). Of course, many of the 'conventional' tasks of managers can be ticked off, and certain types of change projects dealing with technical and administrative systems may include more of such elements than cultural change efforts. Cultural themes like values and meanings are not discrete, permanent, easy to grasp or in other ways possible to package and deal with once and for all or for a time, as suggested in the literature on change that emphasizes a list of successive steps (n-step thinking). Values and meanings are slippery, uncertain, vague and sensitive to drifting. They call for continuous attention and explicit and symbolic work. This does not mean that a lot of time needs to be allocated to 'value talk' and the discussion and clarification of meaning. But to (briefly) point to, remind, illustrate and bring the issues on track at various times is important in order to drive cultural change. Using cultural change-facilitating language is, of course, by definition important.

Finally

- 15 Be careful with engaging in change projects. It is merely a myth that change is always good, and senior managers frequently have unrealistic assumptions and expectations. They start too many projects and too many are soon dropped or carried out weakly (Amundsen 2003; Dawson 2003; Jackall 1988). The result is often cynicism, waste of time and the institutionalization of negative

expectations and a 'wait-and-see-if-something-is-happening' thinking. This makes change more difficult next time. Managers often produce 'wait-and-see' cultures - and complain about the scepticism and inertia resulting from this. Better change work often calls for fewer change work initiatives. There is a large mass media- and consultancy-driven change management industry propagating the need for drastic changes and promises of great accomplishments if the 'right' change model or change consultant is used. A new fashion introduces a gap between the ideal and what exists. Critical and selective responses to these are indicated. Fewer and- as more thinking, effort, energy and resources can be put into these - probably better change projects are to be recommended. We do confess, however, that it is not easy to know when to embark on a change journey. Frequently, one discovers too late that other important and urgent tasks are undermining the change project and this leads to mainly negative consequences. An insightful manager may think: 'I know that only one out of three change initiatives will lead anywhere, but I don't know which.' Perhaps our book has given a modest input to thinking and reflection, increasing the likelihood of a reasonably successful change project.

Notes

2 Organizational change

- 1 For other reviews see Burke (2002); Collins (1998); Dawson (2003); Hughes (2006); *Journal of Organizational Change Management* (2005), 18; Palmer *et al.* (2006); Pettigrew *et al.* (2001); Preece *et al.* (1999); Tsoukas (2005); Weick and Quinn (1999).

3 Organizational culture and change

- 1 A related problem with organizational culture change is that many authors have an interest in the subject matter, meaning that they promote a particular view. Consultants and managers with an interest in consultancy tend to emphasize the great opportunities to change culture, while academic 'purists', eager to maintain an academic, perhaps anthropological, perspective, may be inclined to stick to a view making culture stand above efforts to manipulate it. Of course this overlaps the theoretical definition of culture, but adds to this the personal position of the academic, tending to lead to a pro-change or anti-change view in terms of the possibilities of planned change.

4 The case - and how we studied it

- 1 The name of the company and the names of all persons from the case mentioned throughout the book have been made anonymous for reasons of confidentiality.

5 A cultural change project I: background, objectives and design

- 1 This might, of course, indicate a more sophisticated, 'anthropological' understanding of culture as an interpretative perspective of culture by which everything - leadership, organizational structure, technology and administrative systems - includes a cultural dimension. Culture is then seen as a metaphor for organization, drawing attention to the cultural meaning aspect of virtually every phenomenon from products and budgets to the understanding of competitors and customers (Smircich 1983a). Accordingly one cannot, in contrast to a (more) functionalist framework, single out something as 'outside culture' (Alvesson 2002a). Culture is not everything, but everything that is part of a social context includes a cultural aspect or dimension of socially shared and expressed meaning. Our impression is that this is not what most managers have in mind when they tend to give corporate culture a very broad meaning and sometimes summarize all kinds of organizational 'soft' issues under the culture label.
- 2 We refer to middle managers as those managers being in between top executives (sometimes top managers) and the other employees, mainly engineers. Sometimes we refer to middle managers as either senior or junior depending on their hierarchical position. A senior middle position consists of responsibility for one or several departments.

Junior managers are responsible for a work group or several smaller work groups within a department.

- 3 The initial cultural design actually consisted of six values rather than the five mentioned by Allen. The HR people dropped one later in the process.

8 Disconnected work: cultural change efforts decoupled

- 1 As explained in Chapter 5, the process of developing a cultural change originated during spring Year 1. The Excellence consultant, Ridge, took charge of the development during autumn Year 1 in order to develop a design for a cultural change. As Excellence was disconnected in December Year 1 the design was placed in the hands of the HR people. They were assigned the task of formulating a culture change programme to be presented to the organization in January and February.

9 Hyperculture

- 1 There are, of course, also rules for others, including anthropologists and other culture researchers (like ourselves), on how to talk about culture, but these tend to be looser and are not constrained to a few stated values. The rule for qualitative researchers is to not reduce culture to a few characteristics. The rules for academics writing about culture are of less interest to us here.
- 2 Of course, claims of these being existing values do not rule out that there may be variations and imperfect realization of work practices based on the values. One could imagine something in between ideals and what is realized - something believed in and partly realized. One could for example say that everybody seriously strives to increase the job satisfaction of the employees and that this is an ideal actually guiding managers and others without necessarily being realized fully. In the present case there is no clear indication that this is what people in TC have in mind - the fluctuation is between ideals (targets) and claims of what exists without much explanation or nuances.
- 3 Hyper- and target culture are similar in the sense that they express simplified, good-sounding, for semi-public consumption versions of 'culture', but differ in the sense that target culture refers to ideals and objectives, something to strive for, while hyperculture indicates a representation of what exists or is at least unclear about any possible discrepancy between the existing and the ideal (objectives).

11 Working with change

- 1 Exceptions include Dawson (2003), Heracleous and Langham (1996) and Preece *et al.* (1999).

12 Lessons for cultural change actors and others

- 1 For example, in a study of the establishment of Total Quality Leadership (TQL) practices in the American Navy, Barrett *et al.* (1995) reported that one of the local commanders implementing the change interpreted the TQL initiative as motivated by higher commanders' interest in climbing up the hierarchy, rather than expressing genuine interest in TQL. This cynicism about the motives of the change efforts initially resulted in some lack of commitment and frustration on the part of local commanders.